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Keeping the Lies Alive: Case Studies of the Psychology of Stalinism in Contemporary Soviet Literature and Film by Ellen Chances

"...we have been taught from
an early age
'not to be aware'..."

"...raising a child to be
unaware...serves to mask
the abuse..."

"...the...goal is to uphold
the defense mechanisms of
generations of fathers."

"The greater the refusal to
face the past, the more incom-
prehensible its neurotic and
psychotic manifestations in
the next generation. This is
true for the children of both
the persecutors and the
victims."

—Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not
Be Aware: Society's Betrayal
of the Child*¹

1 Tr. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (New York: New American Library, 1986). Citations from pp.150,146,147,180, respectively.



The book *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*, contains a series of interviews with people whose fathers had been Nazis heavily involved in committing atrocities during World War II. The interviews, conducted from 1985 to 1987 by Daniel Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist who is a Holocaust survivor, are moving testimonies to the ways in which Hitler's ghastly policies of murder have continued to affect, forever after, the lives and psyches of these "children" of Nazi perpetrators. When Bar-On began his research in 1984, he could only find information about the psychology of children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, but none about the psychological impact of the Hitler era upon Nazis and their offspring.² *Legacy of Silence* describes the tragedy of a post-Hitler Germany whose silence about the Holocaust has ensured that subsequent generations — whether they be children of the tormented Jewish victims of the concentration camps (Bar-On himself) or of the tormentor Nazi victimizers (the interviewees) continue to endure the pain inflicted by Hitler upon Germany many decades ago.

Bar-On's interviewees talk about their fathers' and sons' committing suicide. They speak of and demonstrate their emotional numbness. They reveal deep psychological symptoms. One man, son of a Nazi, admits that after Hitler's defeat, he had inadvertently overheard his father discuss with his mother whether or not he should murder his family and take his own life in order to avoid post-war Allied forces anti-Nazi retribution. After that time, the man admits, he had spent several years of his boyhood in fear that the food being set before him had been poisoned by his mother and/or by school authorities. Most of the parents of these "children of the Third Reich," like German society-at-large, hid the truth about their actions from their children. Bar-On documents, among other things, the profound, psychologically traumatic consequences that the parents' failure to confront the truth had upon the children. Even when one father did tell his son the truth, the son, raised in a society of lies, in a society that had gone awry, did not believe the father. Instead, he continued to have faith in the Nazi lies that his youth groups were instilling in him.

Stalin's legacy to his society duplicates, in terms of psychological devastation, the sad history of ruined lives

that Hitler perpetrated on German society. It is to the specifics of Stalin's psychological effect upon Soviet society, as reflected in a few key cultural contributions, that I now turn.

During the summer of 1988, a new film, *To Slay the Dragon (Ubit' drakona)*, opened in Moscow. Based on playwright Evgenii Shvarts' 1943-1944 drama, *The Dragon (Drakon)*³, the movie ends with a clear, crisp message: in order to attain freedom, each individual must slay the personal dragon that lives within his/her soul. Lancelot has given people freedom to kill the dragons, but they themselves keep their dragons alive. They themselves keep themselves enslaved.

This thought is not new to the current Soviet debates about the effects of Stalin on society. During Brezhnev's reign, in 1967, for example, Soviet poet Evgenii Yevtushenko wrote a poem about an "Alaskan" blue fox on a gray fur farm.⁴ The blue fox is different from its gray buddies, and it longs to be free or to trade its "traitor" blue color for a conformist gray. One day, the fox notices that the door to the cage is open, and it escapes. It tastes freedom: "I played pranks, I barked nonsense/ at the trees. I was my own true self./ And the iridescent snow was unafraid/ that it was also very blue."

The blue fox then realizes that it will never be free: "He who's conceived in a cage will weep for a cage," and it goes back to the cage, of its own free volition. The poem ends with these words: "I would like to be naive, like my father,/ but I was born in captivity: I am not him./ The one who feeds me will betray me./ The one who pets me will kill me."

The idea of self-enslavement is also not new to the history of the study of human behavior. We have only to think of one of the most famous arguments about self-enslavement ever to be advanced, Ivan's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor "poem" in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, where the grand inquisitor insists that people prefer security to freedom. Many decades later and many thousands of miles away, American psychologist Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* highlighted the human being's desire to submit rather than to act freely.

2 Daniel Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1989), p.9. Another book mentioned by Bar-On bears out the same conclusions. "The generation of the perpetrators treated their children to lies, silence, and dishonesty," writes Peter Sichrovsky, son of Viennese Jews who had returned to Austria after World War II, in his book of interviews with both highly and not-so-highly placed German and Austrian children of Nazis. Peter Sichrovsky, *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*, tr. Jean Steinberg (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), p.14.

3 "Po motivam Shvarts" ("Based on the Motifs of Shvarts") serves as the subtitle of Mark Zakharov's Mosfilm production.

4 "Monologue of a Polar Fox on an Alaskan Fur Farm," tr. John Updike with Albert C. Todd, in Yevtushenko, *Stolen Apples* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), pp.173-6; Evgenii Yevtushenko, "Monolog golubogo pests na aliaskinskoi zverofarme," *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, II, *Stikhotvorenniia i poemy 1965-1972* (Moscow, 1984), pp.187-8.

Mikhail Gorbachev has alluded to the particularly acute form of this phenomenon that was generated by the Stalin era. In his book, *Perestroika*, he asserts, "The difficulties we are experiencing in the democratization process are largely of our own making. We are all products of our time, of a certain pattern of things and habits. Therefore we say that we all have to change ourselves..."⁵ He sees that the challenge of perestroika is not limited to the political and economic arenas. Gorbachev admits, "Psychological habits that have become ingrained over the years cannot be abolished by any decree, even the most formidable."⁶

Other Gorbachev pronouncements pursue this theme. In September, 1988, the Soviet leader pressed for radical change, not only in agriculture, industry, the party and the government, but "most of all — in people's consciousness, in their attitude ... toward themselves."⁷

Other people's statements in other recent Soviet publications address the same issue. Literary critic Lev Anninskii's analysis of Vladimir Komilov's poetry, in a 1988 *Novyi mir* article, weaves into the discussion assertions about the importance of individual responsibility. He quotes a Komilov poem whose gist is that when freedom came, he was not ready.⁸

A professor of psychology, writing in *Novyi mir*, argues passionately for the necessity of a "perestroika of our soul" ("perestroika nashei dushi").⁹ Writing in *Kommunist*, Professor Igor Kon of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Ethnography blames much of the Soviet Union's present-day social inertia on the diseased genes of the Stalin legacy.¹⁰ In the darkest years of Stalin's purges, people were afraid, for good reason, to utter their own opinions, to tell the truth about what they were witnessing. They would convince themselves, writes Kon, that all was well in the world when, in fact, they knew that this was not the case. Kon states that it is extraordinarily difficult for society to overcome the decades of conformity bred by fear.

In March, 1989, *Literaturnaia gazeta* brought together a group of Soviet clinical psychologists. Their round table discussion centered on the psychological effects of "the stagnation syndrome" on the ego.¹¹ One

psychologist, E. Novikov, admitted that clients would often ask whether a child should be raised "...according to truth or according to life."

In another context, Swiss psychoanalyst Alice Miller has described the mechanism by which children's perceptions of the world become distorted when adults lie to them. Miller writes that adults lie and make children believe that the truth that they are seeing is not the truth. Adults protect the societal distortions that make up their world. Children are left confused, with their truth denied by those people whom they most trust. The result, according to Miller, is devastating to the healthy development of the personality.

A significant part of Miller's book, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, has to do with her attack on Freud for his refusal to accept what his patients were revealing to him about their childhood histories of sexual abuse. Miller explains that rather than accept the truth of case after case after case of women coming to him and talking about having been sexually abused by the adults closest to them, Freud constructed the seduction theory. As children, these women, according to Freud, had really not been abused; rather, it was the children who were making up sexual fantasies. It was the children who were, in fantasy, seducing the adults.

Miller argues that in creating his seduction theory, Freud simply could not accept the truth of what the adults had done. Instead of exposing the adults' crimes, Freud placed the blame on the victims (it's all in your mind — you're making up these incidents — you are not seeing what you are seeing). In this way, explains Miller, Freud was upholding the construct of societal lies and was contributing to the psychological damage inflicted upon the children. Miller states, "Change in society is brought about by uncovering and recognizing the truth in its entirety, not by manipulative methods based on acceptance of social taboos."¹²

The particulars of Freud's seduction theory, childhood sexual abuse, and the restructuring of psychoanalytic theory lead us to a very different world from that of the particulars of the history of Stalin's abuses and of contemporary Soviet societal restructuring. Yet Alice

5 Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, updated ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p.60.

6 *Ibid.*, p.90.

7 "V družestvennoi obstanovke. Rech' tovarishcha Gorbacheva M.S.," *Pravda*, 29 September 1988, p.2.

8 "Pred voleiu i bedoi," *Novyi mir*, No.2, 1988, pp.237-45.

9 G. Shakurov, "Sotsiosentrizm ili sotsializm?" *Novyi mir*, No.7, 1988, p.266.

10 "Psikhologiya sotsial'noi inertsii," *Kommunist*, January 1988, pp.64-75.

11 "Kruglyi stol 'L.G.' Naedine so vsemi," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1 March 1989, p.10.

12 *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, p.303. I am extremely grateful to Troup Matthews for first introducing me to Miller's writings. Miller also devotes part of another of her books to Hitler and German society of Hitler's time, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, tr. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1989). Much scholarly work remains to be done on comparative studies of Hitler and Stalin, of Germany and the Soviet Union in their respective attitudes to the Hitler era and to the Stalin era during and after the dictators' lifetimes.

Miller's major findings, in their broad implications, are applicable to the Soviet situation.

A key problem of perestroika, as chronicled by the movie *To Slay the Dragon* and stated by Gorbachev, Anninskii, and Kon, is the psychological scar that cuts across Soviet society. People have been psychologically traumatized by Stalin's terrors, and these people have passed on the wounds to their children. The documentation of this phenomenon is the focus of two significant contributions to contemporary Soviet culture, Russian writer Andrei Bitov's novel *Pushkin House* (*Pushkinskii dom*) and Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze's film *Repentance* (*Pokaianie*).

Each of these works was created before Gorbachev came to power. Abuladze's movie was produced in 1984¹³, and Bitov's novel was completed in 1971. The Soviet public was denied access to each of these works during the pre-Gorbachev era. Abuladze's film was not allowed to be released. Non-problematic portions of Bitov's novel appeared in scattered Soviet journals during the 1970s, but the novel as a whole was not allowed to be published in the USSR. It came out in Russian in the United States in 1978.¹⁴

It was only with the advent of glasnost that many daring, honest works of art that appraised the legacy of Stalin's tyrannical policies ceased to be "shelved." Abuladze's movie was released in 1987, with the help of prominent politician Eduard Shevardnadze.¹⁵ Bitov's novel was published in the distinguished Soviet journal *Novyi mir* in 1987, and it was published in the Soviet Union in book form in 1989.¹⁶

Bitov's *Pushkin House* plots the painful disease of Stalinism as it downs generation after generation of Soviet citizens.¹⁷ The novel concerns Lev Nikolaevich Odoevtsev (Leva, for short), a Russian literature graduate student in the Academy of Sciences Leningrad Literary Institute, Pushkin House. Bitov focuses on three significant incidents in Leva's life, each of which is contained in one of the three major "sections" (*razdely*) of the novel, each named after a nineteenth-century Russian

literary masterpiece. The first, "Fathers and Sons" (*Ottsy i deti*), addresses Leva's relationship to the past; the second, "A Hero of Our Time" (*Geroi nashego vremeni*), his relationship to the present; and the final section turns to his relationship to his creative gifts.

In an interview, Bitov spoke about *Pushkin House*: "...the worst kind of slave is one who suppresses his own rebellion. This is, generally, what the novel is about. It is the story of a slave who might have avoided that fate. A strange kind of mutation has occurred in people. One must sort out things in society, but, primarily, in one's own self. Even Chekhov said that all his life he had been squeezing the slave out of his system, drop by drop..."¹⁸

The mutation about which Bitov speaks in the novel is that caused by Stalin. In the course of the entire novel, he never once mentions Stalin by name ("Perhaps the real meaning [of *Pushkin House* — E.C.] is between the lines," Bitov declared)¹⁹, yet the implication is that it is Stalin who has ruined people's capacity to live a normal life.

From the beginning of the book, Bitov shows the way in which Leva's life has been thrown out of kilter by the disjunctures brought about by the Soviet dictator. Bitov writes that Leva's life resembled a thread that started to coil up into rings (*kol'tsa*)²⁰, each ring piling up on the first ring. As we read *Pushkin House*, we realize that the first ring, the ring upon which all else falls, is Stalin. The lethal quality of that ring is repeatedly alluded to, as the narrator brings up a legend about scorpions. According to the legend, the insects commit suicide by turning in on themselves and stinging themselves. We read, "Embodied experience stings itself, like a scorpion, and goes to the bottom. And if you have already had the misfortune to acquire it (experience...), don't embody it, because you won't repeat it — it'll repeat you!"²¹

Destructive and self-destructive rings — vicious circles — symbolize the destructive and self-destructive relationships that plague Leva's life. And, writes Bitov, it is "HE" that "unites us all."²² It is "HE" that caused the unhealthy relationships to be formed. The implica-

13 *Le cinéma géorgien*, ed. Jean Radvanyi (Paris: Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1988), p. 146.

14 *Pushkinskii dom* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1978). An English translation was published in 1978. Andrei Bitov, *Pushkin House*, tr. Susan Brownberger (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1987).

15 The film was first produced for television since Abuladze thought it would not be approved by the central film agency, Goskino. Karen Rosenberg, "Repentance," *In These Times*, 16-22 March 1988, p. 24. Joseph Corintelli, editor-in-chief of Georgian television for the past 12 years, explains that Shevardnadze first encouraged Abuladze to work on the film and then, for a time, discouraged its release, claiming that the time was not yet ripe for the film to come out. Joseph Corintelli, "Georgia Today: People, Art, Literature," Columbia University Harriman Institute talk, 23 March 1989.

16 *Novyi mir*, No. 10, 1987, pp. 3-92; No. 11, 1987, pp. 55-91; No. 12, 1987, pp. 50-110.

17 An analysis of *Pushkin House* is included in my book, *The Ecology of Inspiration: The Shapes of Andrei Bitov's Prose*, forthcoming in the series, *Studies of the Harriman Institute*.

18 "Andrei Bitov: In Search of Lost Meaning," interviewer Vadim Prudnikov, *Books and Art in the USSR*, vol. 3/58, 1988, p. 34.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Pushkinskii dom*, p. 160.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

tion is that this "HE" is Stalin. A key message of Bitov's book is that if the first ring is composed of lies, all the other rings that form on top of it will also be composed of lies. And that first lethal ring is Stalin.

In recently discussing a literary hero, Bitov declared, "A hero is not a person. A hero is not the author. Perhaps he is the portrait of a generation."²³ And indeed, Leva is the representative of a generation, a particular generation that was born at the height of Stalin's terrors. Both Leva and Bitov were born in 1937. This generation was brought up in the atmosphere of fear, lies, and betrayal that gripped Soviet society. In fact, Bitov considered calling *Pushkin House* by different titles, *The Lie* or *Betrayal*.

Because of Stalin, all realms of Leva's life — in the personal, creative, and familial spheres — were distorted. And the novel documents the way in which the Stalin era sent ripples of irreparable psychological damage through the whole of Soviet society. The way in which Bitov accomplishes his task is to show, in the first section, the way in which Stalin had taken a toll on Leva's family life. He shows that the normal continuity of generation to generation — grandfather to father to son — had been broken.

Leva's grandfather, Modest Platonovich Odoevtsev, had been arrested and had spent thirty years in concentration camps. He returns to Leningrad, a destroyed, nasty, drunken old man. He does not live with his family, but rather, with Koptelov, his former camp guard. Leva's father had built his career by criticizing his own father's ideas. Koptelov is a good person, Modest Platonovich explains to Leva, because "twice he didn't kill me..."²⁴

All his life, Leva had not even known that his grandfather was alive; his parents had hidden the truth from him. He goes to visit him, eager to worship both man and mind, and instead, is subjected to a barrage of drunken, vilifying accusations, insults, and attacks. Leva gets drunk and throws up in the taxi on his way home. When he gets home, he refuses to talk to his parents about the visit, even though he knows that they are eager to hear news about the elderly Odoevtsev. Leva feels that that day, he had "become worse."²⁵

The reader sees that because of the disease of Stalinism visited upon society, family ties are broken.

Grandfathers don't live with their children and grandchildren. One human being likes another because "twice he didn't kill me..." Children make their reputations by betraying their fathers. People live a domestic life of lies: a father does not tell his son that his grandfather is alive. And children suffer the consequences of the lies by which society lives.

In the course of "Fathers and Sons," Bitov introduces us to "Uncle Dickens" ("*Diadia Dikkens*"), another elderly alcoholic of Modest Platonovich's generation, who had been arrested and had spent many years in Stalin's concentration camps. A lonely old man without family, he lives with the Odoevtses, serving the function of a sort of surrogate grandfather. He, too, had been permanently scarred, emotionally, for he was incapable of providing emotional support to anyone. All of his energies, explains Bitov, are directed toward making certain that he does not fall apart. This man, too, plays a role in the harm done to Leva. At the point when Leva most needs gentle comfort and support, Uncle Dickens is not capable of giving of himself to the young Leva.

Leva's visit to his grandfather forms one of the diseased rings that piles up on that rotten first ring.²⁶ In the section of *Pushkin House* entitled "Fathers and Sons," we see that the "father" Stalin had abused his "children," and that the process was passed on from generation to generation of Soviet father and son. Bitov writes, "Father was the time itself. Father, papa, cult — what other synonyms are there?"²⁷

"A Hero of Our Time," the second section of Bitov's novel, continues to document the devastation wrought upon Leva's life. In this part of the novel, Bitov demonstrates the way in which Leva's relationships with his peers are damaged. Since, in his family life, he had been wounded by those who themselves had suffered abuse, Leva behaves in ways that are both destructive and self-destructive. Because he has been lied to, he lies to those who treat him decently. Albina loves him dearly, and he repays her kindness by inflicting cruelty upon her. Faina does not love Leva, and he is drawn to her, even as, time after time, she inflicts psychological wounds upon him. She lies to him, and he lies to Albina. The lies bred in society continue to multiply. Mitishatiev, a schoolmate and later, graduate school colleague of Leva's, is the personification of evil. Leva knows this,

22 *Ibid.*, p.251.

23 "In Search of Lost Meaning," p.34.

24 *Pushkinskii dom*, p.69.

25 *Ibid.*, p.102.

26 "Kol'tso" is also the Russian word for "circle." Thus, Bitov's image of the "first ring" resonates to another novel with a circular literary image that treats the theme of Stalinist labor camps, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* (*V krugu pervom*). And, of course, Solzhenitsyn's novel resonates to Dante's *Inferno*, an earlier work about the circles of hell.

27 *Pushkinskii dom*, p.56.

and yet, time after time, he falls under Mitishatiev's power.

The third part of Bitov's novel, "Poor Horseman" (*Bednyi vsadnik*)²⁸ turns to the tragic consequences of the Stalin era for Leva's creative gifts. Bitov implies, even in his insertion of epigraph after epigraph quoted from previous Russian literature, that as a result of the endless rings of humiliation, Leva is not able to be original. Everything, writes Bitov, is a substitute for something real. At a cultural event for the intelligentsia, the people who were supposed to be there were not, and in their place, others showed up. A poem read at this event includes a reference to the fact that something false is substituted for something real, that everything is upside down.²⁹

An article that Leva writes, discussed in detail in *Pushkin House*, contains some unoriginal ideas, for Leva, explains the narrator, did not have access to scholarly works that had been suppressed since the Stalin era.

In his novel, Bitov has thrown the spotlight on the many facets of Leva's life that had gone awry because of Stalin, the original perpetrator of the lie. And Bitov demonstrates, all through the novel that was almost called *The Lie* or *Betrayal*, that once the "thread" of lies and betrayal is woven into the fabric of a society by a "father," that thread weaves itself around and finally chokes the children of that society who have been left with the legacy of the lie.

According to Bitov, it is only possible to break out of the lies by stepping away from the framework altogether. It is only possible to acquire freedom by declaring oneself free of that system. Leva could have become free by refusing to acknowledge Mitishatiev's power over him. Leva himself, writes Bitov, was hurt by Mitishatiev because he *let* himself be hurt by him.

Leva's tragedy is that given the vulnerability to life that had been bestowed upon him by Stalin, the generation of the warped grandfathers, and that of the warped fathers, he was incapable of breaking away from the distortions. He dies, victim of a duel with Mitishatiev, embodiment of the Stalinist forces unleashed in Soviet society. Bitov's narrator, justly, claims that the most important theme of the novel is dislocation.

Abuladze's film, *Repentance*, deals with the same phenomenon, the societal dislocations spewed forth by a tyrannical dictator. Couched in allegorical terms, the movie tells the story of a city mayor whose physical

description and tactics represent a blend of Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Beria. Like Beria, he wears a pince-nez, loves opera, and kills the husband of a woman to whom he is attracted. Like Stalin, he terrorizes society by carrying out random arrests of "enemies of the people" in the name of the common good. Like Hitler, he has a tiny mustache and rides around in a car. Like Mussolini, he is dressed in brown.

The story of Varlam Arabidze's deeds is indeed familiar to people who know the taste of Stalin's poisoned deeds. Like Stalin, Varlam builds his power on paranoia. Varlam imprisons people at random — all those with the same last name, for instance. He is highly suspicious of artists, of members of the intelligentsia. In this respect, he sends his *oprichnik*-like troops to arrest Sandro Barateli, a free-thinking artist who objects to the use of a church for scientific experiments on the grounds that the experiments are destroying an ancient monument of Christianity.

Repentance tells the story of Sandro's daughter, Ketevan, who, as a young girl, lived through the arrest of both her father and mother. When Varlam dies, she digs up his grave, saying that she cannot rest while he remains entombed. She cannot stand the fact that the lies of society are buried. Varlam is hailed as a great figure, and she knows that that is not true.

What we see is that Varlam's son, Abel, and his wife, Guliko, who, as the mayor's heirs, lead a materially affluent life, do not want to face the truth of what Varlam's deeds really were. Abel defends his father. He declares that his father was always working toward the common good. He declares that his father never killed anyone with his own hands.

Symbolically, Ketevan represents the attempt to expose the truth that everyone else tries to conceal. From personal experience, she knows what a tyrant Varlam was. Unlike countless other people, she is not afraid to utter the truth. Hers is a battle with the many, many forces that want to stifle the truth about a vicious dictator.

Abel, Varlam's son, insists that his father was a good ruler who always had the common interest at heart. The court that tries Ketevan for her "crime" of digging up Varlam's body wants to convict her as a criminal or as a madwoman. This is exactly the pattern that Alice Miller outlined in *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*: society blames the person who sees the truth for crying out that truth. Society, in its attempt to protect the lies, does its best to

28 This title is derived from combining Dostoevsky's "Poor Folk" ("Bednye liudi") and Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman" ("Mednyi vsadnik"). A subsection of this section, called "Bronze People" ("Mednye liudi"), combines the titles of the same two works of nineteenth-century Russian literature.

29 *Pushkinskii dom*, p.248.

muzzle the person who cries out that the emperor is wearing no clothes.

Like *Pushkin House*, *Repentance* concentrates on the dictator's disastrous imprint on subsequent generations. Abel, like Leva Odoevtsev's father, has lost his sense of morality. In a surrealistic sequence in which Abel confronts his feelings, he is told by a God/devil figure who resembles Varlam, "You pulverize anyone that stands in your way." Like Leva's father, Abel will do anything to further his career and to protect his personal security. He admits, finally, that his life has been a void cultivated in order to avoid facing the essential big questions — who are we? why were we born? — that define a life of purpose.

In *Repentance*, as in *Pushkin House*, the suffering of the generation of the grandchildren is shown with particular poignancy. Ketevan, or Keti, Barateli has been left an orphan at an early age and is literally ostracized from society — in one scene, she is placed in a cage — for maintaining her integrity. Tornike, Varlam's grandson, begins by defending his family's honor. He shoots at the unknown criminal who has been defiling his grandfather's grave. We surmise from later events that he had been using the gun that his grandfather had given him.

As events unfold, and as Tornike learns Keti's story, he begins to question his family's version of life. He asks Abel whether he had known about Varlam's criminal deeds. Abel tells his son that Varlam had done no wrong. He tells Tornike that the times had been complicated. Tornike believes that the time factor is irrelevant because the issue is one of basic human right and wrong. He believes that his family must accept guilt rather than try to justify Varlam. An intense confrontation between father and son ends with Abel's slapping his son across the face rather than admitting that Varlam may have been the perpetrator of evil.

The ideas in Alice Miller's book live on. Tornike is rejected by his father because he told the truth and because his father had to protect the distortions that his father had unleashed on society. The damage to Tornike is lethal. He shuts himself up in his room and shoots himself, with the very gun that his grandfather, Varlam, had given to him. Varlam's gift to society and to his family was violence. As in Bitov's *Pushkin House*, if the first ring is rotten, the ones that pile up on it will also be rotten. Leva Odoevtsev dies a violent death, murder victim in a pistol duel. Tornike Arabidze dies a violent

death, victim of suicide, or self-murder. In *Pushkin House* and *Repentance*, the poisoned heritage of a dictator, two generations later, continues to poison society.

Speaking about his film, Abuladze asserted, "...in *Repentance*, the victim was an entire people. What does Abel's son and Varlam's grandson, our son and our grandson, say: 'Haven't you gotten sick and tired of so much lying? How long will you go on reassuring yourself with lies?' These words had been tormenting me for a long time, for a long time even before the idea for the film came to me. I understood that I must shoot the film for young people, in order to free myself and them from the addiction to lies."³⁰

Both Bitov and Abuladze indict the dictators for turning their backs on artists, those creatures who are among society's most precious inhabitants. For writer and director alike, in killing the creative intelligentsia, the dictator strikes a blow at divinity. *Pushkin House* plots the demise of the divine spark of the poet, as Bitov draws an analogy between Modest Platonovich (literally, son of Platon, or Plato) and Alexander Pushkin, author of a poem, "*Prorok*" ("The Prophet"), that sings of the poet's divine nature. "*Repentance*" chronicles the murder of the artist Sandro, who, in the film's visual imagery, is likened to Christ. In one sequence, Sandro is shown in white, barefooted, hanging, like the crucified figure of Christ.

Abuladze's movie ends with a scene that is highly charged with symbolism. The adult Keti is shown baking cakes and decorating them with flowers and churches. An old woman comes up to the window and asks, "Does this road lead to the church?" Keti answers, "This is Varlam Street. It will not take you to a church." The old woman's response is, "Then what's the use of it? What's the use of a road if it doesn't lead to a church?" In a sick society, a person's only contact with spirituality is in the guise of sugary, ephemeral churches that dissolve and are literally gobbled up.

Eternal, authentic values, for Abuladze and for Bitov, have been twisted out of shape. In the upside down, topsy turvy world shaped by Varlam, Abel — rather than Cain — is the traitor. Varlam (a Georgian variant of Balaam)³¹ — rather than the true God — is the leader. In the false world of *Pushkin House* shaped by Stalin, cultural monuments are distorted. "Poor People" become "Bronze People." Mitishatievs — rather than Modest Platonoviches — rule the institutes where creative studies of literature should be contemplated.

30 "Ja sdelał etot fil'm dlja molodykh..." Alla Gerber conversation with Tengiz Abuladze, *Iunost'*, No.5, 1987, p.82.

31 I am thankful to Joseph Corintelli for pointing this out to me.

Abuladze, in discussing *Repentance*, stated, "Faith is ... the acknowledgement of those eternal ethical norms which human consciousness has worked out. ... Can we really renounce eternal values? Ideally we try to develop them..."³² Bitov's and Abuladze's creative forays into the land of Stalin's heritage make impassioned cries for truth. Like Alice Miller, these two artists affirm that a society whose adults breed and defend lies will end up with offspring whose psyches are seriously damaged. And, sadly, eternal values are the sorry victims as the liars do their best to promote their warped vision of reality.

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32 Abuladze, "Ia sdelaet etot film...", pp.84-5.

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